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Jessica Dickson oral history interview by Andrew Huse, February 17, 2004

Jessica Dickson (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

Narrator: Jessica Dickson (D)
Current Position: Student and Women's
Basketball Player
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Interviewer: Andrew Huse (H)
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TRANSCRIPTION

H: Today is February 17, 2004. My name is Andrew Huse, program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. Today we're continuing a series of interviews in our studio here at the Tampa campus library with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni in order to commemorate fifty years of university history. Today we'll be interviewing Jessica Dickson, who came to USF a year ago, in 2003?

D: Yes, I just came in 2003. This is my first year. I'm a freshman.

H: She came here as a student, but she's also on the basketball team. Good morning, first of all.

D: Good morning.

H: Thanks for being with us.

D: You're welcome.

H: How did you first hear about USF? How did you first get involved as a student?

D: I played basketball in high school, so I went through the recruiting process. Coach Fernandez and Coach Hiro were recruiting me. They used to send me letters and stuff like that. I decided to come here through basketball. I'm glad I made that decision

because I really love it here. It's close to home, as well.

H: Was that one of the big draws for you, that you're close? You come from Ocala, right?

D: Right. That was one of the biggest things for me, to stay close to home. I'm a very family-oriented person and I want to be close to my family. That way they can come see me and I can go back home and see them.

H: It's easy for them to come see your home games, too.

D: Yes, that was a big reason.

H: What was the recruiting process like? Did you have a lot of people sending you letters and stuff?

D: Yes. I would collect all the letters. I still have a big bin at home, it's with my mom, and it's full of letters. I still have shoeboxes full of letters. It was a hectic deal, but I had to narrow my choices down, and I did. It was like, FSU, Clemson, Florida, UCF, but I just narrowed it down to USF. I'm glad I did.

H: What other incentives were there? Did you meet the coaches ahead of time? Did that have an effect? What other things besides just geography?

D: They told me that I have a chance to come in and play and make an impact at USF. I met with the coaches. They came to my home. They were nice, family-oriented, and they made me feel good about coming here. That helped, too.

H: When did you arrive? Did you arrive for a fall session last year?

D: I arrived here in the summer. I took summer school and then I started in the fall and then spring.

H: Tell us about first arriving. Did you live in the dorms? Do you still live in the dorms?

D: No, actually, we live in apartments. We live in Avalon Heights. It's actually nice. I love

it there. That's good.

H: What's it like being out of the house for the first time and involved in so much activity?

D: It's really different. Actually, when I was coming here, I was a little sad because I had to leave my mom and this would be my first time away from home. Your mother's not over you, telling you what to do. Do your homework. Clean your room. It's different. That experience, living by yourself, you have to tell yourself to clean your room, get your work done, make sure you wake up on time for class. It's very different.

H: Tell us about the basketball environment when you first arrived. How was it different from what you were used to? What really struck you as being different or new?

D: I think the basic thing for me was getting to know the girls. In high school, I knew those girls from ninth grade to twelfth and we were close. Coming in just getting used to everyone [and] everyone's personality and things like that. But, we're really good friends now. I just love them. They're just like sisters to me.

H: What about the process of going on the road? Does that really help you bond?

D: Yes, it does. We change roommates every time we go on a road trip, so I get to spend time with a different girl. Being on the road, you have to keep up with your work, stuff like that. So, it's kind of hard. But you get used to it.

H: What about the classroom environment? How is that different from what you're used to? What leaps out at you there?

D: Basically the lecture classes [are different]. Some of my English classes, they're just like high school size. That wasn't a big change for me, but mostly the lecture-type classes. [There are] so many students in one class.

H: What position do you play?

D: I play small forward, the three, sometimes the two, shooting guard.

H: Is that similar to what you played in high school?

D: Not at all. In high school I played power forward, the four, and sometimes the five. It's different. In high school I was always down low on the block. Now in college I'm outside, the guard position, handling the ball, shooting, so it's a big change for me.

H: Do you notice a difference in your performance since you've come to USF just in how you play?

D: I think I have adjusted well. I think I shoot better now than when I was in high school. I don't think I could shoot as far as I do now. It has been a big adjustment for me. I think I'm playing very well now in college.

H: Do you think working on the outside has helped you improve your shooting range?

D: There are things I still have to work on. I want to work on that in the off-season. Hopefully, [I'll] come back [and] have more range to my game or dribbling skills. I just build a better player add-on to my game each year.

H: What would you say is your best moment so far in USF basketball?

D: When we played TCU we went into double over-time. I'm not trying to brag or anything.

H: No, please do.

D: [There were] some seconds left, we got the ball, and one of the players slipped. I thought, oh man, we're gonna lose. But she managed to handle the ball, pass it to another teammate and they got it to me. I took two dribbles and made a half-court shot. That sent us into double over-time. Right now, that's my most memorable moment.

H: Wow. That's like something straight out of the movies or something. I mean, a half-court shot in the last couple seconds and really saving the team there.

D: Yeah.

H: That made all the difference and you guys won?

D: Yes. I think it was a real momentum-builder for us, going into the rest of our conference games, building on that momentum. It was a very good moment and I'll never forget it.

H: I'm sure your teammates won't, either.

D: I bet they won't.

H: What was it like after that game? You guys must have been in hysterics.

D: I don't know what to say. I was so happy and everybody else was so happy. It was a great moment for us and a great moment for USF basketball.

H: What about your coaches? Were they just gushing at you?

D: They were overwhelmed. We didn't realize that we hadn't won the game. We went into over-time. The coach was telling us, it's not over yet, it's not over! You've still got to play five more minutes! They had to get everyone calm and back collective in the huddle and get ready to play our overtime.

H: The point that you scored tied it and sent it into what, triple over-time?

D: No, [it sent us into] double over-time.

H: Okay. Then on the other hand, what's been the most difficult? What was probably the most difficult time for you?

D: I'd say the most difficult time for us would be starting our conference. We started out a little rough. We didn't get that many wins. As we went on, we started to gel together as a team and we found we went on a little winning streak. Starting off, it was kind of tough.

H: Tell us a little more about your coaches? What's different there? You mentioned that

they're nice, family-oriented people, but is there a different style to coaching that you maybe weren't used to before, or that's a little different?

D: I'll say, first of all, in high school I had a woman coach, so I had to adjust being in college with a man coach. I'll say, it's a lot more yelling in college than in high school, so I had to get used to that. It really doesn't affect me. The yelling, I think, motivates me to do better. That's probably one of the biggest differences.

H: It sounds like it's just a lot more intense.

D: Yes, it's more intense than high school.

H: What about life around campus? How do you spend your time? What are some of the things you like to do for fun?

D: Basically, mostly basketball takes up a lot [of time], but for fun, just hang out with my teammates. We'll go to the house and just hang out or go to the movies or something like that. We try to find time in between basketball to do team activities.

H: Are you on the campus dining program?

D: Unfortunately, no. We're not on the dining program. We get the meal plan money instead of the dining. We have to go buy our own groceries.

H: How's that different? Do you cook at home now?

D: Yes, we cook different at home. My mom used to cook all the time, so now it's me or my teammates who will cook something. That's different, as well.

H: What else? What haven't we covered? There's so much to cover here. What about a major? Have you declared a major?

D: Right now I'm looking into business administration. I plan to own my own business one day. That's what I'm looking into right now.

H: In a perfect world, what business would you open after college?

D: Actually, I'm looking to start my own clothing line maybe, and have my hands in a little bit of basketball, something like that.

H: What about being in Tampa? How is that different than where you grew up in Ocala? Is there much difference there?

D: There's a big difference. It seems to be more faster pace down here in Tampa than Ocala. [There's] a lot more traffic here. Ocala's not really that big, but it's not that small. I'm used to seeing familiar faces around in Ocala. I go to the store and I know this person. It's not like that in Tampa. It's new faces for me and a lot more people down here.

H: What about when you guys are on the road? How do you blow off steam? It must be a lot of excitement all the time. Do you guys have any things you do to just unwind and help relax?

D: We'll go to each other's rooms and just sit there and talk and stuff like that. There's really nothing in particular.

H: What about pranks?

D: Yes, we do pranks. I remember this one time, some of my teammates and I got water balloons and filled them with water and put some milk inside. My teammates went to the store. They live in the apartment right across the street from us. They went to the store and we waited for them to come back from the store. We hit right in front of their apartment. When they came up the steps we just started hitting them with water balloons and everything. They started running. They said, that was not very funny! They said they were going to get us back, we don't know when. I'm looking behind my shoulder

each day. That was very fun.

H: How long has it been since that ambush?

D: I'd say almost a month. I'm pretty sure that they're thinking of something. They're going to get us back.

H: Some of those water balloons were full of milk, too?

D: Yeah, we put some milk in there. I don't think they found that too funny, with the milk in there. We chased them up and down the stairs. They finally got in the house and they called us yelling at us, oh, we're going to get you back! That was very fun. I wish I had a camera.

H: Do you have any heroes, people you look up to, whether it be scholastically or athletics, etc.?

D: My all time favorite basketball player, of course, is Michael Jordan. I just love him. I would be amazed how he'd fly through the air just like that. He was amazing to me. I just loved him. He could hang in the air [and] shoot the ball. The moves that he would do were just jaw dropping. He's one of my idols.

H: Did you grow up watching his games?

D: Yes, I grew up watching his games. That was great.

H: What else? I'm sure we've missed a bunch of stuff. There's so much to talk about.

What about some of the experiences playing games? Where's the team at right now?

D: Right now, in conference, we're four and seven, but we just won on Sunday over UAB.

That was a televised game, so hopefully that will give us some momentum going into our Friday's game, we play Southern Miss. at seven o'clock. Hopefully, we're looking to go to the NIT and the conference USA tournament, and I think we have a real good chance.

We're coming together and we're going to do this. Hopefully [we'll] win the conference USA championship. It may not be this year, it could be next year or the year after that, but I'm looking forward to that.

H: It's good, because you're just getting started. You've got a chance.

D: Plus we have a long ways to go. We have a lot of room to grow. We're only losing two seniors this year, so a lot of people will be returning for next year.

H: Obviously, a lot of students come here. They're leaving home for the first time. Aside from class and studying, they've got nothing but time. You have a lot more pressures on you than a lot of regular students do. How do you cope with that?

D: Sometimes I think, dang, I wish I was a regular student, because I see so many students who after their first class they're finished. After my class, [I think], dang, I have to go to basketball practice. I'm really enjoying it. [I'm] just coping it, and [I] just find things to do like go to the movies. I find things to do. I love basketball, so that's what I like to do.

H: Is it tough to make time for your studies? Like exam time, does it really get to be a crunch?

D: Sometimes it is, and I know sometimes the coaches will let us out of practice early so we can go study. They make accommodations for us so we can do good and stay eligible.

H: What about your folks? Have you had them out for many games?

D: Well my mom, she comes basically every home game. She sits up there and she's like a coach. I'm like, dang mom, stop talking, or I wish you wouldn't do that. She'll go like this, which means, turn it up a notch. She's just there supporting me and I love her very much. She's been basically, like I said, to all our home games. She's a real big fan.

H: Your big half-court shot, was that a home game? Was she there for that?

D: Unfortunately, she wasn't there for that one. I was like, dang mom, you missed it! She was like, oh no! She had to stay home with my niece, who was sick. She missed it, but we got it on tape for her and we sent it to her.

H: So she can watch it again and again.

D: Yes, again and again, as many times as she wants.

H: Looking ahead, what are you looking forward to the most out of the whole university experience?

D: The most important thing to me is getting my education, graduating from college. That's going to be a big focus of mine, as well as basketball. For me, winning a Conference USA championship is one of my goals, and also to leave here being the highest scorer in women's basketball. That's one of the biggest goals of mine.

H: That is a big goal, very ambitious. What about professional?

D: That's one of my goals as well, to go to the WNBA. Hopefully, I'll get there.

H: What about women players? Do you have any that stand out that you'd really like to emulate?

D: I'd say Cheryl Ford, I really like her, and Lisa Leslie, I like her too. Those are two of the people that I like.

H: Well, I'm sure you'll be up there in that pantheon if you can get your goal of the top scorer.

D: Yes, hopefully, I'll make it to the WNBA and accomplish my goals.

H: You're probably in the beginning classes as a freshman, but are you looking forward to sinking your teeth in that business administration and learning the ropes there?

D: I'm looking forward to it, but the only thing that I'm not looking forward to is the math

part. That's going to be a big challenge for me.

H: I can relate. My brain isn't wired that way.

D: Math is not one of my greatest subjects. I'm sure I'll have a lot of help. I'll get through it.

H: Obviously, you have a lot of ambition and a lot of drive. So if you can channel that into that math the same way you did with the half court shot, it shouldn't be a problem.

D: No, I don't think it will be a problem. I think once I get the formulas down and things like that, it will be a lot more easier. Tutoring will help as well.

H: Have we missed anything? I always say that and then we have all this other stuff to talk about.

D: I can't think of anything else right now.

H: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

D: Yes, I have an older brother. He's twenty-four. I have two younger brothers. They live in Detroit. [I have] a younger sister. With my mom, it's just my older brother, me and my older brother. My dad had three other kids.

H: Your older brother, has he come out to see any of your games and stuff?

D: Yes, he's been to a few of my games. He basically helped me with basketball. We used to play in the yard when I was eight years old. He used to always beat me, so I'd go into the house crying to my mom, and my mom would tell me, go back out there and keep playing. My step dad as well, he helped me with the recruiting process. He used to beat me as well. He helped me a lot. They really motivated me.

H: It sounds like they toughened you up, too.

D: Yeah, they really toughened me up. I found out later that they cheated me, but that just

made me better.

H: Back to your clothing line, do you have a name?

D: No, I don't have a name yet. Sometimes I try to brainstorm, but I haven't come up with that name yet.

H: When you look around at your teammates, do you see any of them being professionals later on? Are there some that have really impressed you?

D: As far as professional athletes?

H: Just playing, and their intensity on the court.

D: I'd say Nalini [Miller]. She's very strong and powerful. I say she may be able to [play professionally]. I'm not sure if any of them want to go professional. I'm not sure if they do. I think she'd be a good one. I'm not sure about the others because I really don't know if they want to go professional.

H: Obviously, you're meant to learn a lot from the coaches. Do you tend to learn from your teammates, too? Is there anything you pick up?

D: Yes, I know some of the upperclassmen, when we're in the huddle they'll tell me things to do on offense and defense like reading the defense and stuff like that. They try to encourage me, so they do help us freshmen along the way.

H: What's it like being a freshman, and coming in and obviously, some of the players are freshmen, too, and then you've got the upperclassmen. Is there any kind of, I don't want to use the word hazing, but is there any kind of ritual you have to go through? Do they give you a hard time?

D: No, but I know me and one of my other freshmen friends, her name is Rachel, the upperclassmen, Sharon Cambridge, she's a sophomore and Alana Tanksley, she's a

junior, we'll go over to their house, and every time they beat us up. I don't know why.

It's not a bad beat up, but it's a fun wrestle. They just wrestle us. It's basically those two that get us every time we go over there. That's it. There's nothing terrible, terrible.

H: Oh, sure. I wouldn't think there would be.

D: They always wrestle us. That's pretty fun.

H: Are you involved in Greek life, any sororities?

D: No, I'm not.

H: You probably don't have the time for that.

D: Actually, I don't. I'm not involved in anything like that though.

H: What about any events on campus that have stood out in the last six or eight months for you? [Are there] any events, concerts, festivals, things like that? Have you gone to anything like that?

D: I think last week they had a polo show. I did go to that, and I enjoyed going to that. I'm in a jazz class, it's called Monday Night Concerts, so we'll attend those for classes. That surprised me. I didn't think I would like it, but I really did like. [I go to] little concerts like that.

H: Did you have much exposure to jazz before the class?

D: No, I didn't. When I saw I had that class, I thought, man, this is probably going to be boring. But after going to the concert and things like that, it was really good. I liked that.

H: What is it that you like about that?

D: The music, the musicians, stuff like that. It has a nice sound to it; a mellow sound. That was really great for me.

H: How is the class and the music different from what you were expecting?

- D: I thought [during] the class we were just going to sit there and read through the book and read about all these jazz great people. Going to the concerts and hearing the music, I thought it was going to be a boring class [where I would] just sit here and just listen to him read or have to read through the book. It surprised me.
- H: Are there any other classes for you that stand out [or] any professors that stand out as being especially good or different?
- D: I'd say my public speaking class. I really don't like to get up and talk in front of people. This class is going to teach me how to break that. Our professor, he's really enthusiastic. I really like him a lot.
- H: What's his name?
- D: His name is Chris. I don't know his last name. I really like him. He's energetic and he's very funny as well.
- H: It's sounds like it's informal if you know his first name but not his last, he must say, call me Chris.
- D: Yes, he said to just call him Chris.
- H: I'm trying to think if there's anything else. We should come back in another year or two when you have more experience. Then we could talk about what's gone on since then. I'm sure there's going to be more exciting action on the court, off the court. I hope you don't get ambushed with the water balloons or anything like that.
- D: Oh, I'll be watching.
- H: Is there anything you want to add? I have some closing questions, but is there anything you just want to share?
- D: I just really enjoy being here. You see something new every day and you learn

something new every day. I just love being here. USF is not this big gigantic, gigantic campus, but it's big at the same time. Once I got used to it and got familiar with the campus, I love it. I'm glad I'm here.

H: In closing, I would ask, for someone in high school, playing basketball let's say, what advice would you give them going into the recruiting process, going into picking out the university? What kind of advice would you give them?

D: I would give them the advice, when the schools are calling you, make sure you have questions to ask them. Ask them, where am I on your recruiting list? Am I in your top five? Am I in the top ten? Ask them about living arrangements. How many student athletes do they graduate, stuff like that. Make sure it's a good decision. Make sure you weigh your options, if you want to be close from home or if you want to be away from home. For me, I didn't want to leave my mom. Ask them questions. Get to know them. Get on a personal level with them. That's four years of your life that you have to spend at a college and with teammates that become your friends and are like sisters or brothers. Make sure it's where you want to go and what you want to do.

H: Then for someone who's chosen a university and they're about to go off to school, what advice would you give them to keep everything in balance?

D: I would tell them, first of all, make sure you have everything you need like for your apartment or dorm room. Just enjoy the experience of going to college. I know my mom tells me every time she talks to me, enjoy college, because it's the best time of your life. Sometimes, I'm like, oh mom, I'm nervous. She just tells me to live in it and enjoy it and take it all in. That's what I would tell them.

H: It sounds like you followed your mother's advice, that you're getting the most out of your

experience. When you're done, the very best years of your life may be over. It's going to prepare you for all the other stuff that lies ahead.

D: Yes, she tells me that because you can't get these years back. Once it's over, it's over. After college, bam, it's the real world. She tells me that. I'm thankful for her telling me that.

H: Have you given any thought to an advanced degree? I know it's early in the game to be thinking about it.

D: No, I haven't given any thought to it.

H: Thanks a lot, Jessica, for being with us this morning. If there's anything you want to add, you can always give us a ring. Good luck with the conference and everything else.

Thanks again.

D: Thank you.

End of Interview